

LANDMARKS DESIGNATION REPORT



MEDINAH TEMPLE IN CHICAGO, HVEHL & SCHMID ARCHITECTS

600 North Wabash Avenue

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, May 2001



CITY OF CHICAGO

Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development

Alicia Mazur Berg, Commissioner



Above

The Medinah Temple represents an architectural oasis on the southwest corner of Wabash Avenue and Ontario Street. Its lavish, sculptural masonry provides a marked contrast to surrounding concrete and glass highrises.

Cover

The ornately detailed entrance pavilion to the Medinah Temple includes arabesque ornament and Arabic script proclaiming: "There is no God but Allah," which is a traditional inscription found on Islamic mosques. The title type (below photo) is taken from the headline of a 1913 *Architectural Record* article.

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks.

The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council following a detailed designation process. It begins with a staff report on the historical and architectural background and significance of the proposed landmark. The next step is a vote by the Landmarks Commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. Not only does this preliminary vote initiate the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until the final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

Please note that this landmark designation report is subject to possible revision during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance recommended to the City Council should be regarded as final.

Medinah Temple

600 North Wabash Avenue

Built: 1912

Architect: Huehl & Schmid

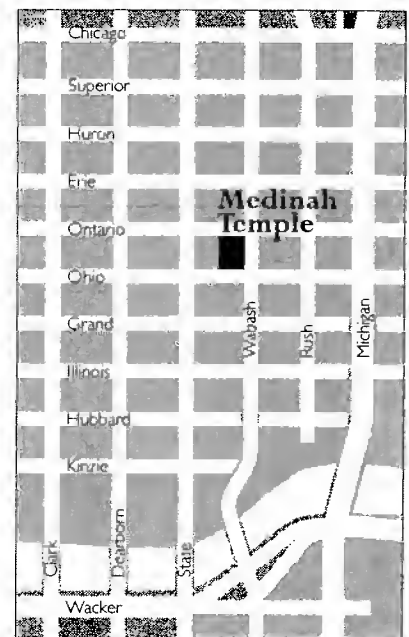
In the new Medinah Temple, recently erected for the Masonic order of the Mystic Shrine in Chicago, is found one of those rare instances in which a building designed in a historical style remote from our 20th century civilization and ideals seems logical and in harmony with its surroundings.

— *The Architectural Record*, April 1913

The views of this architectural critic still seem appropriate—more than 85 years later—as the four-story tall Medinah Temple remains one of the most distinctive structures on the Near North Side of Chicago, due to its exceptional craftsmanship, exotic design details, and its history as one of the city’s longtime cultural centers.

The building was constructed to house a 4,200-seat auditorium for the Chicago chapter (the “Medinah Temple”) of the national Shrine fraternal organization. The building’s unique appearance marks it as an extremely rare example of the Islamic Revival, a style of architecture that was popularized during the first decades of the 20th century by the Shrine organization. It is considered one of the nation’s finest examples of an Islamic-style temple and it was ranked as one of the top 200 buildings in the city by the *Chicago Historic Resources Survey*.

The building’s exterior provides a textbook of Islamic details, from horseshoe and ogival arches to arabesque-style ornament. Its exquisite brick-and-terra cotta work is a tribute to the Shrine organization’s origins as a 16th century British stonemasons guild. As one critic noted in 1913: “No member of the Shrine, or layman who knows something of the ideals of this order, would ever mistake this building for other than what it is.”



The Medinah Temple occupies a half-square block in the River North neighborhood, two blocks west of the famed North Michigan Avenue retail district.

This 1893 photograph of the leadership of the Chicago chapter ("temple") of the Shrine fraternal organization was taken nearly 20 years before the construction of the Medinah Temple building. From its earliest years, the Shrine chose Islamic-inspired clothing, rituals, and building decorations for the imagery of its organization.

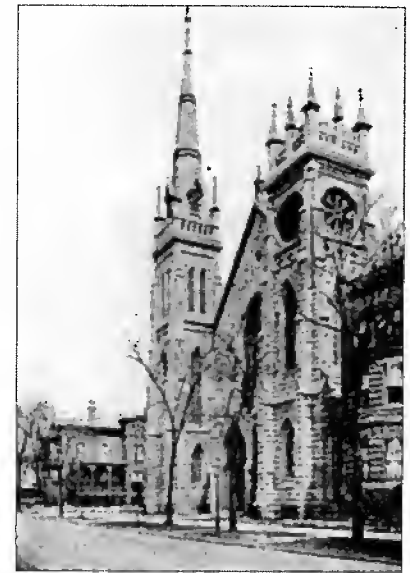


The Origins of the Medinah Temple

The Medinah Temple was built to serve as the Chicago headquarters of a popular national fraternal organization, the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (a.k.a. the Shriners). Founded in New York City in 1872, the Shrine was one of several organizations established in the late-19th century that restricted its membership to men already active in "Freemasonry," an ancient British stonemason's guild that had evolved into a social club of gentlemen, merchants, and tradesmen.

In order to become a Shriner, a member had to have achieved either the status of a "Knight Templar" in the Masonic York Rite or the "32nd degree" in the Masonic Scottish Rite. The Shrine was conceived of as a secret society that would honor the underlying seriousness of Freemasonry while incorporating rituals filled with levity and entertainment. It was structured around local groups, known as "temples," which were the regional equivalent of neighborhood Masonic lodges. A temple was given the exclusive right to draw membership from the region in which it was located, and only one Shrine temple was given a charter in any given city.

The historic Islamic culture of the Middle East was chosen as the source for the symbols, motifs, and identities that would be used by the Shrine organization. The temples were given exotic-sounding names from Islamic history or geography, such as Mecca (New York City), Kismet (Brooklyn), Murat (Indianapolis), or Al Malaikah (Los Angeles). The board of officers of each temple was known as the Divan and officers were given titles such as "potentate," "rabban," or "high chief and prophet."



Left: The rapid growth of the Shrine's local membership prompted this humorous 1907 *Chicago Daily News* cartoon of what life would be like "When Everybody is a Shriner," ranging from the Islamic clothing of policemen and baseball players to the design of streetcars.

Above: Prior to the construction of Medinah Temple, the Shrine occupied the former Unity Church on North Dearborn Street.

Initiation and other rituals utilized exotic set decorations and Islamic-inspired clothes, such as the well-known red fez. The buildings that the local Shrine temples built to house their activities were referred to as "mosques" and were designed using Islamic-inspired architectural forms and details. This appropriation of Islamic imagery provided a stage within which American middle- and upper-middle-class men could escape ordinary work and family responsibilities and enter an imaginary world of the "carefree" Middle Eastern oasis.

The Medinah Temple, as the Chicago Shrine organization was called, was founded on June 6, 1883, and was the 14th Shrine temple in the United States. It was named for the city of Madina al-Nabi, where the prophet Muhammad fled in 622 A.D. and founded the first Islamic state, before mounting his conquest of Arabia. (The official location of the Medinah Temple within the Shrine organization is in the "Desert of Illinois; Oasis of Chicago.")

For the first few years, the members of the Chicago Shrine organization met in rented public halls and local Masonic lodges. Between 1893 and 1903, the organization was housed on the top two floors of the Medinah Building, an office building at Jackson and Wells (now demolished). Between 1903 and 1912, it occupied the former Unity Church at Dearborn and Walton (now the Scottish Rite Cathedral and part of the Washington Square Chicago Landmark District).

Membership in the Chicago Shrine organization expanded greatly during the early 1900s, reaching more than 11,000 by 1911, when the need for a larger mosque was recognized. That year, the organization bought the mansion of the late Judge Lambert Tree, which was located on Wabash Avenue between Ohio and Ontario. It selected the Chicago architectural firm of Huehl & Schmid to design a new mosque for the site.

A building permit was issued on October 7, 1911, and the cornerstone was laid three weeks later in an elaborate ceremony held at midnight on Halloween, which was attended by about 5,000 members—nearly half the total membership. The new Medinah Temple mosque was dedicated a year later, when it was called “the largest auditorium in the world erected by a social organization.”

Building Description

The plethora of Islamic and Middle Eastern ornament found both on the exterior and interior of the Medinah Temple gives it a sense of exotic fantasy that well suited the Shrine rituals the building sheltered. This decor also provided a memorable setting for the many concerts, circus performances, lectures, and other events that have been held here over the years. Nonetheless, the primary purpose of the Medinah Temple was to function efficiently as the Chicago headquarters of a rapidly growing social organization. As an article in the April 1913 issue of the *Architectural Record* noted:

The Medinah Temple is thoroughly modern, while the Arabic elements are so woven into the design as to become an integral part of it. This building is, in fact, a modern structure, with Arabic decorative expression, just as the Shrine itself is an organization modern in its ideals, but possessing an Arabic ritual.

A four-story building, the Medinah Temple covers the eastern half of a city block bounded by Wabash, Ontario, State and Ohio streets. Its original footprint is roughly 150 x 218 feet, and the building’s exterior form clearly expresses its primary interior space, which is a 4,200-seat auditorium—termed at the time as “the largest and most impressive in the West.”



This 1913 photograph (left) depicts the building's main entrance pavilion and one of its original corner domes. The contrast between square and curved forms (above) gives the building a dynamic street presence.

The building's central feature is a large rectangular pavilion facing Wabash, which marks the main entrance and lobby area. At the four corners of the building are smaller pavilions that provide secondary entrances and house the building's main staircases. In between these entry pavilions—and above a one-story base—the walls of the building curve to the contours of the auditorium within. This combination of rectilinear and curved building forms gives the exterior of the building a dynamic street presence on its very tight urban site.

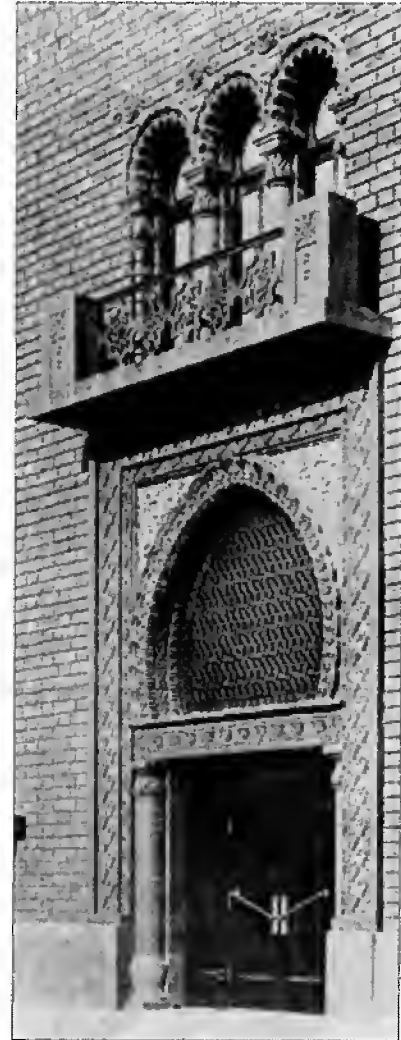
Built of reinforced concrete, the exterior of the Medinah Temple is faced with brick walls of unusually high quality and craftsmanship, which is appropriate since the building was constructed to house a fraternal organization whose origins were rooted in the art and craft of traditional stonemasonry.

The brick itself is orange-brown colored and mottled with dark flecks. Its "wire-cut" finish gives it the impression of handmade bricks, rich in color and texture. This appearance is further heightened by the style of the masonry work. The bricks were laid in a variation of the Flemish bond, featuring alternating headers and stretchers in each course, with each header centered above and below a stretcher.

What is particularly unusual, however, is the size of the "bricks," which were formed by combining groups of four (for the stretchers) and two (for the headers) regular-sized bricks. By finishing the mortar joints flush with the face of the bricks, the result was alternating rectangular and square "superbricks." The building's scale is large and blocklike,



The Medinah's sculptural, monumental quality is enhanced by its decorative terra cotta and distinctive brickwork. Each of its "superbricks" (detail, top) is actually composed of two or four regularly sized bricks. Their "wire-cut" finish complements the building's Islamic-style ornament (above).

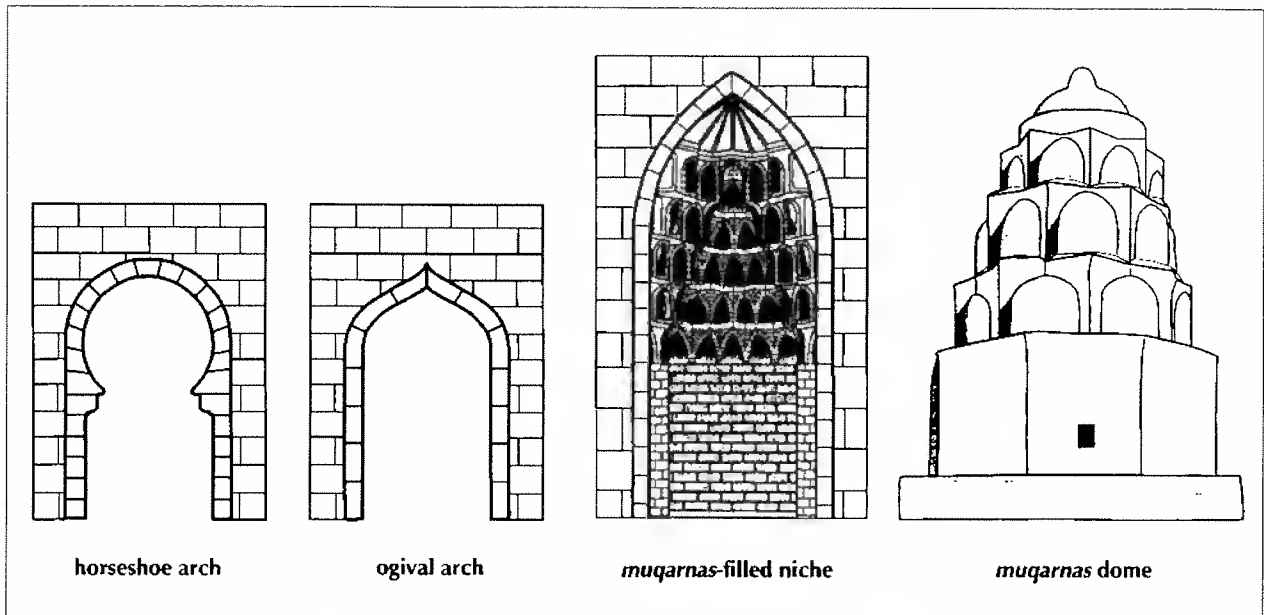


The Medinah is literally encrusted with terra-cotta ornamental designs common to Islamic-style mosques. Clockwise, from top left: a *muqarnas*-filled niche, a horseshoe-arched corner entrance, arabesque details surrounding a lattice-filled arch, and Arabic script.

but with a very fine sense of detail—a highly unusual combination for a Chicago building.

Medinah Temple is lavishly detailed with Islamic ornament. The entrances and many of the second-floor windows are framed within horseshoe-shaped arches, which was a common detail on such Spanish Moorish buildings as the Great Mosque of Cordoba and the Alhambra Palace complex in Granada. Pointed ogival arches, another common Moorish detail, were used for first-floor windows. Intricate patterns of geometric forms or stylized plants (referred to as arabesques) form decorative surrounds around the doors and windows.

The building's main entrance (see cover) is dominated by a four-story rectangular arch, bordered with bands of terra cotta contrasting in color and ornament. Within this arch is a smaller, two-story horseshoe arch that shelters the entrance. Above this arch is a row of five connected



horseshoe-arched windows, separated by engaged columns; above that are three single rectangular-arched windows. The main entrance is flanked by decorative *muqarnas*-filled niches accented with decorative faceting, again a common feature in Islamic mosques and palaces.

This illustration from an art history textbook shows some of the common features of historic Islamic-style architecture.

Surrounding the main entrance is a continuous terra-cotta band of Arabic script, composed of cream-colored lettering atop a dark brown background. It reads: “There is no God but Allah,” which was a traditional inscription found in Islamic mosques. The lettering used here was based on the exact lettering found in the Alhambra. (The existing, projecting metal canopy above the entrance represents a remodeling of the original canopy, which was thinner and more decorative.)

The building’s secondary, corner entrances are set within horseshoe-shaped surrounds that are topped by clusters of horseshoe-arched, rectangular, and square windows. The upper-floor windows in the curved exterior walls of the auditorium are similar in form and set within recessed panels decorated with Arabic tracery. The building’s original terra cotta domes, which were set atop the two corner pavilions facing Wabash, were based on Persian and Ottoman mosque precedents and were covered with arabesque patterns. (These domes were removed early in the building’s history—about 1939—and the upper portions of the pavilions were rebuilt. The architect of record for this remodeling was W.J. Ryan.)

Much of the building’s ornament is architectural terra cotta produced by the Midland Terra Cotta Company of Chicago. Its finish was roughly textured to appear handmade. Flat bands of terra cotta, mostly in dark



Many of Medinah's windows are filled with stained glass that has been attributed to Louis Millet, an artisan who worked with architect Louis Sullivan on the Auditorium Building.

browns but with contrasting reds and blues, were molded into a variety of abstracted arabesque patterns that frame the entrances and windows. Terra cotta also was used for the projecting ledges above secondary entrances, around some upper-floor windows, and on a variety of cornices throughout the building. All were ornamented with flat foliate patterns. Much of this terra cotta remains, although several small terra cotta balconnettes gracing upper-floor windows have been removed, as has the top portion of the cornice above the entrance pavilion.

Decorative metal grillwork, forming flat geometric patterns, fills entrance arches and low, rectangular basement windows. Stained glass—in whites, greens, and browns—fills many of the building's casement windows and transoms. Their designs are detailed with arabesque patterns arranged in a manner that suggests a variation on the Sullivanesque style of ornament popularized by architect Louis H. Sullivan. (We have been unable to confirm reports that these windows were designed by Louis Millet, an artist who worked in Chicago around the turn of the century. Millet's notable works include the stencilling and stained glass in the Auditorium Building, which was designed by Adler & Sullivan.)

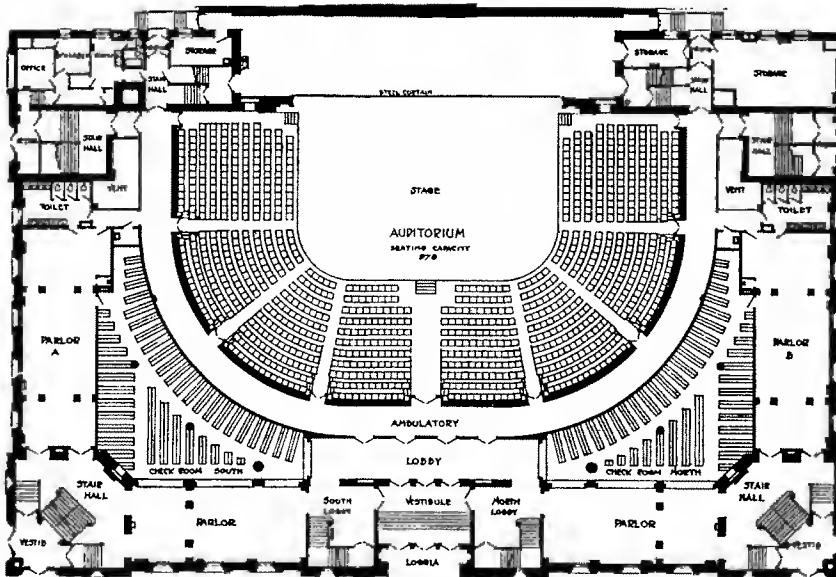
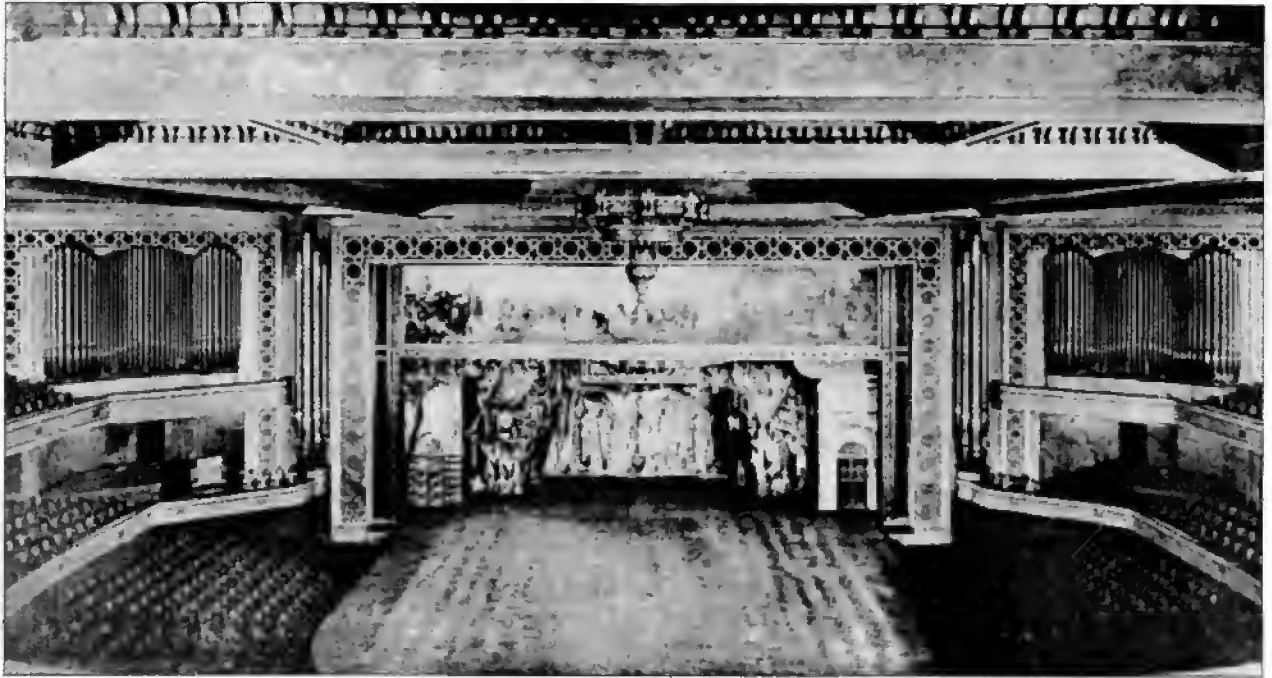
The design of the Medinah Temple attracted a great deal of praise upon its completion. *The Architectural Record*, a national architecture magazine, called it one of "those rare instances in which a building designed in a historical style...seems logical and in harmony with its surroundings."

More recently, the *AIA Guide to Chicago* (1993) has noted that while the building's architect, Huehl & Schmid, had created scores of fanciful Shriners auditoriums: "This is one of their largest and best preserved." The *Chicago Historic Resources Survey* identified the building in its 1986 field survey of the Near North Side, giving it the highest possible survey ranking ("red"), an honor accorded to only 200 buildings citywide. Finally, *Chicago's Famous Buildings* (1993) cited the building's

Exuberant domes and highly textured surfaces...[which] promise excitement, the unexpected, and the exotic to its audiences...[filling its] low-rise block with forms that are at human scale and visually diverse, providing an oasis of space and light in the increasingly dense high-rise development that surrounds them.

The Temple's Interior

Medinah Temple's interior is largely devoted to a 4,200-seat auditorium and a basement banquet hall seating 2,300. The first floor originally held four lounges, and the public circulation areas, including staircases and secondary lobbies, are simply detailed and efficiently designed.



Above: The Medinah Temple's 4,200-seat auditorium, includes a projecting 'thrust-style' stage—a common feature of Shrine theater designs.

Left: Surrounding the auditorium is a series of parlors, small lobbies, and coat-check rooms.

The auditorium is grand in scale, with a 50-foot-high ceiling ornamented with a large, 80-foot-wide saucer dome. The dome is double-shell in construction and its design is based on that of the mosque of Hagia Sophia, located in Istanbul, Turkey, which was built as a church during the Byzantine Empire. A ring of windows at the base of the dome is filled with stained glass similar to that found in the exterior windows. A central chandelier, 12 feet in diameter and containing 255 electric light bulbs, hangs from this dome.

The auditorium's seating is arranged in three tiers—main floor, balcony, and gallery—that curve around the central stage, which projects 45 feet into the audience. This combination of a proscenium-thrust stage was a typical feature in Shrine mosques; it was 68 feet wide. Steel ceiling trusses reduce the number of support columns, providing fine sightlines for the audience.

A mural above the proscenium arch, painted by artist Gustave A. Brand, depicts a desert pilgrimage. Temple lore states that the figures in the painting are portraits of the Medinah Temple's officers from 1912. The auditorium was redecorated in 1924 and, although the mural, central chandelier, and stained glass were retained, additional surface decoration based on Hagia Sophia was added.

The auditorium's large concert organ was installed in 1915 by the Austin Organ Company of Hartford, Conn., and is considered by organ enthusiasts as one of the finest "symphonic style" organs in the United States. It contains 5,120 pipes from one-half inch to 30 feet in length and is operated from five keyboards.

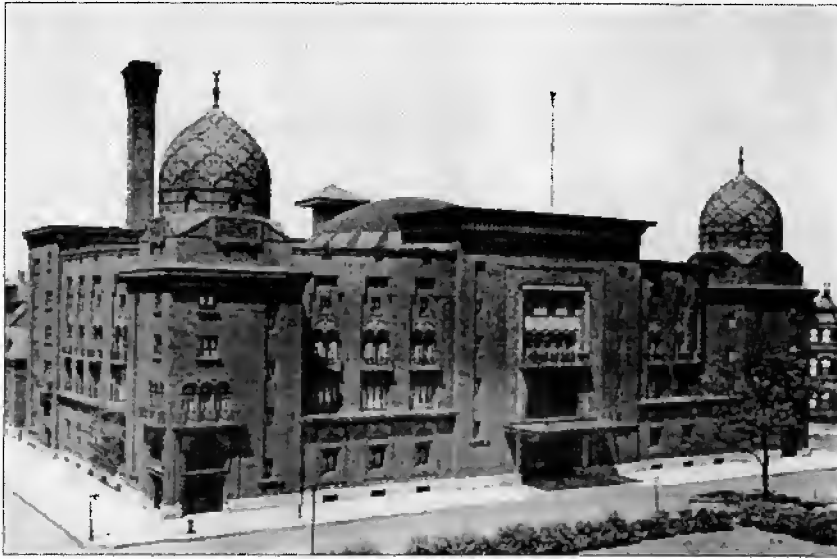
Exterior Alterations

Although the exterior of the Medinah Temple remains largely intact, there have been several changes that have altered its original appearance. The most notable one was the removal, in about 1939, of the building's two original terra cotta domes, which necessitated a reconstruction of the top floor of the corner pavilions facing Wabash Avenue. These domes were not replaced for 15 years, until 1954, when copper-clad "onion-shaped" domes were added atop the corner replacement roofs. (These replacement domes subsequently were removed in 1995.)

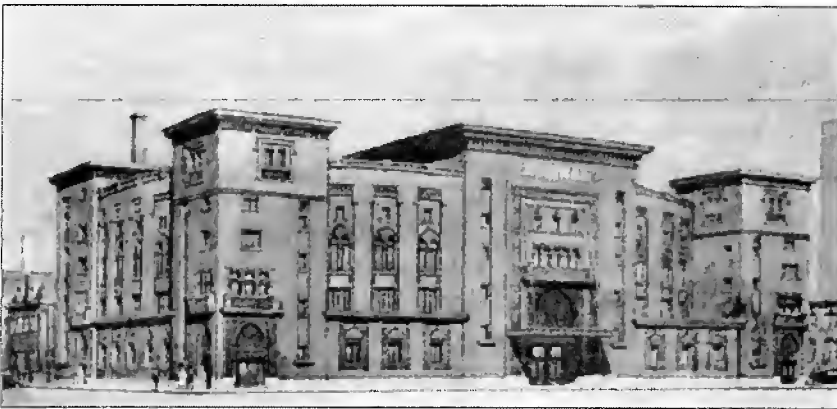
Other alterations include the replacement of the building's original wood-and-glass entrance doors with bronze-metal units. Approximately a dozen small upper-floor balconettes, featuring decorative wrought-iron railings, also have been removed over the years.

In 1959, a three-story rear addition, known as the Unit Building, was constructed on a portion of the courtyard of the adjacent Tree Studios complex. This 23,000-square-foot annex, which largely is not visible from the surrounding streets, provided space for rehearsals, storage, and meetings. During the mid-1990s, a large electronic billboard was installed on the building's Ohio Street facade.

Despite these minor changes, the Medinah Temple still possesses good physical integrity, retaining the vast majority of its historic features and decoration.



The major alteration to the Medinah Temple has been a series of changes to its corner pavilions. The building's original terra cotta domes (top) were removed in c. 1939 and replaced by rebuilt, flat-roofed pavilions (middle). In 1954, these pavilions were topped by sheet-metal, onion-shaped domes (bottom) that, subsequently, were removed in 1995.



The Great Mosque in Isfahan, Persia (Iran), which was begun in the 11th century, illustrates some of the traditional features of Islamic architecture.



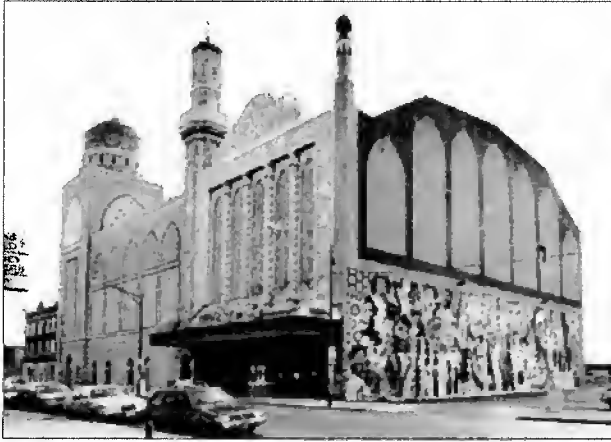
Islamic Architecture and the Shriners

The architecture of ancient Islam—a style that predominated in western Asia from the seventh through 13th centuries—has not been a common source of inspiration for American architects. In fact, its most prevalent use in the United States has been during the early-20th century by the architects who designed dozens of regional mosques throughout the nation for the Shrine fraternal organization.

Islamic-inspired buildings were rare in the early days of the United States. One of the first was the Bazaar in Cincinnati, Ohio, which was a combination ballroom-and-shopping arcade built in 1828 and featuring onion domes and an arabesque-detailed arcade. One of the best known early Islamic-influenced buildings is “Longwood,” an octagonal house in Natchez, Mississippi. It was designed in 1860 by Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan and featured horseshoe-arched porch details and a central onion dome.

The image of the “Oriental pleasure dome” was inspired by the various Islamic-inspired pavilions that were built at numerous world’s fairs held in the U.S. during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Their popularity led to the construction of several theaters, music halls, movie palaces, and resort hotels in the style.

A famous example was the Tampa Bay Hotel in Tampa, Florida, which was built in 1891. Its onion domes and minaret towers were said by one contemporary writer to be “patterned after the [Moorish] palaces of Spain, with horseshoe arches and crescents everywhere visible

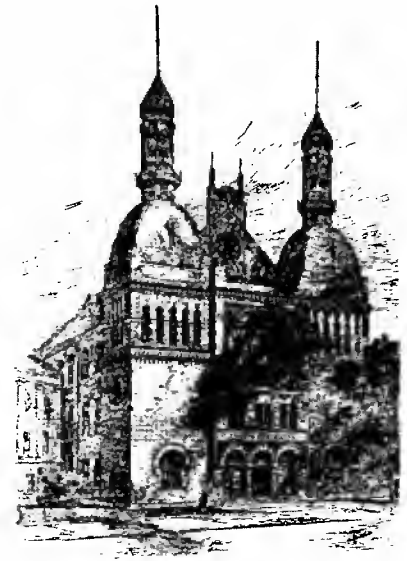


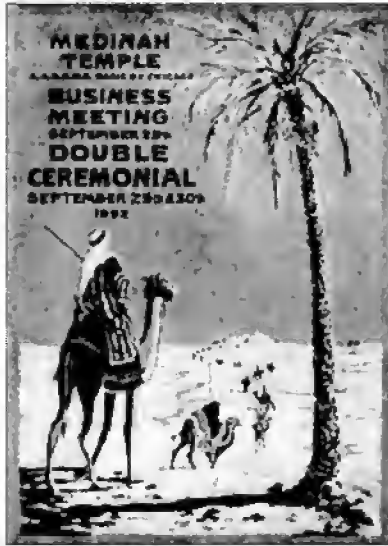
Among the few examples of Islamic-influenced design in the U.S. are (clockwise, from top left): the New Regal Theater on Chicago's South Side (1926), the Tampa Bay Hotel (1891) in Florida, the since-demolished Zion Temple on the city's West Side (1885), and the Longwood mansion in Natchez, Mississippi (1860).

in the design." A much later, local example is the New Regal (formerly Avalon) Theater, 1641 East 79th Street, designed in 1926 by architect John Eberson.

Perhaps the most common use of Islamic design in the late-19th century was for Jewish synagogues. Gothic architecture, the most widely accepted style for Christian churches, was seen as unsuitable for Jewish synagogues and temples. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's *What Style Is It? A Guide to American Architecture*: "The Moorish Revival had historical precedent in the beautiful Mudejar synagogues of Spain that were built before the 15th century." Two prominent early examples were the Central Synagogue in New York (1870-72) and Adler & Sullivan's Zion Temple in Chicago (1885; demolished c.1955).

During the 20th century, however, the most common examples of Islamic-based architecture were the various regional temples built by the Shriners fraternal organization. Their use of Islamic-based



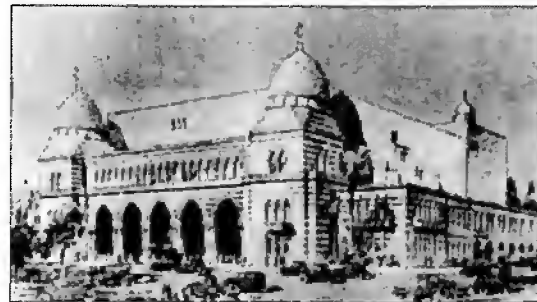


Romantic Middle-Eastern imagery was a pervasive part of Shrine culture, even for the cover of this 1922 business meeting brochure.

architecture and ornamentation reflected the organization's identification with Islamic imagery, which could be seen in the names of its chapters and officers, its rituals and programs, and even its costumes.

The Islamic world of the Middle East had long been depicted—mainly through literature—as an exotic place where time stood still and where men were free of the trappings and responsibilities of Western civilization. The founders of the Shrine organization saw their new fraternal group as one that would teach American men how to be “legitimately frivolous,” according to an 1925 article by Imperial Potentate (national president) James E. Chandler. Consequently, most of the Shrine rituals incorporated a Middle Eastern sense of exotic indulgence and freedom.

Early in the organization's history, local Shrine chapters (temples) shared space with other masonic groups. By 1900, however, they had become large and prosperous enough to begin constructing their own buildings. Due to their Arabic-inspired rituals, Shrine buildings became known as mosques and utilized many of the details of Islamic architecture, including horseshoe arches, minarets, onion domes, geometric decoration, Arabic-script panels and friezes, and ornamental grilles. Their auditoriums featured elaborate thrust-style stages that provided the proper setting for Shrine pageantry, especially initiation rites.



During the first three decades of the 20th century, Islamic-revival architecture found its principal use in Shrine mosques. Seen here (left to right) are the: Murat Temple in Indianapolis, Indiana; Irem Temple, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; Al Malaikah Temple, Los Angeles, California; and Kismet Temple, Brooklyn, New York.



Medinah Temple was the first of several Shrine-related buildings designed by Harris Huehl (left) and Richard Schmid (right). Both men were Shriners and Huehl had served a term as potentate (president) of Medinah Temple.

The first Shrine mosque to use Islamic forms and details was the Lu Lu Temple in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which was designed by Frederick Webber and completed in 1904. Its horseshoe arches, arabesque ornament, and onion domes set a standard for dozens of other Shrine temples to follow, including Chicago's Medinah Temple. Other early Islamic-style designs were the: Irem Temple in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania (1907), Kismet Temple in Brooklyn, New York (1909), and Morocco Temple in Jacksonville, Florida (1910).

The Architects of Medinah Temple

In most cases, the Shrine mosques were designed by architects who were members of the Shrine. Medinah was no exception. Both partners of Huehl & Schmid, the firm that the Medinah Temple selected to design its new building, were Shriners.

Harris H. Huehl had served one term (1905-06) as the potentate (president) of Medinah Temple. Fellow Shrine member **Richard Gustave Schmid** (1863-1937), who trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, had worked for Boston architect Henry Hobson Richardson and his successor firm, Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge (the architects of the Chicago Public Library-Cultural Center). A native Chicagoan, Schmid returned to Chicago in 1890, when he formed an architectural partnership with Huehl.

The firm of Huehl & Schmidt enjoyed a solid reputation for its designs of private residences, apartment buildings, commercial stores, and small loft manufacturing buildings. Among their surviving buildings are: 4849 South Ellis Avenue (1897) in the Kenwood Landmark District; 116 and 123 West Illinois Street (1909-11); and 706 and 800 West Hutchinson Street (1905-08) in the Hutchinson Street Landmark District.

Huehl & Schmid's flamboyant design for the Medinah Temple gave the firm national recognition. It also led to more commissions for Shrine buildings, including the Syria Mosque in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1915; demolished).



However, the firm had never received a commission the size and visibility of the Medinah Temple. In researching their design, at least one of the partners reportedly traveled to the Middle East to get a first-hand look at various examples of Islamic style architecture.

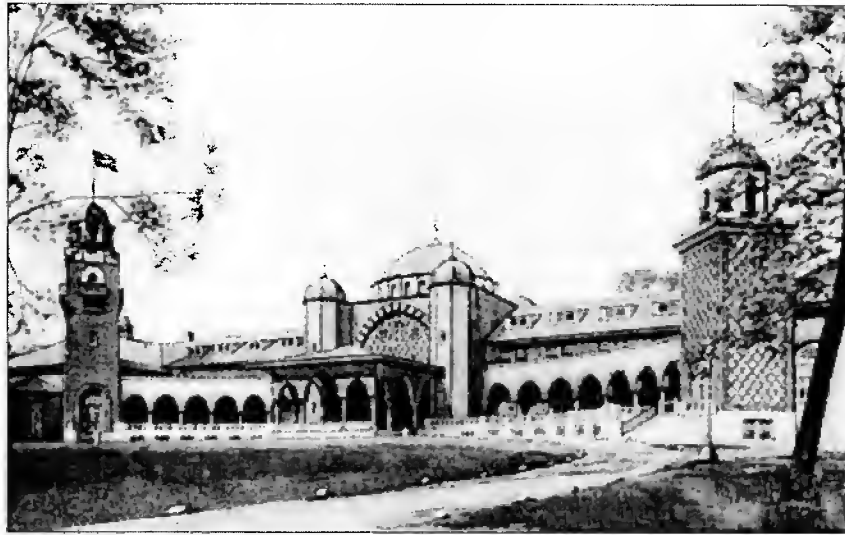
The firm's efforts paid off. Upon its completion, the Medinah Temple was widely praised as one of the nation's most masterful expressions of the Shrine's aesthetic ideals. It was featured in two of the nation's leading architectural magazines, *The Architectural Record* and *Western Architect*, and its success quickly brought other commissions to the firm—primarily for Shrine temples and Masonic lodges. In 1915, the firm designed the Syria Mosque for the Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) Shrine Temple. Later, the firm was commissioned to design a Masonic Temple in Allentown, Pennsylvania (1922), the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Newcastle, Pennsylvania (1923), and fraternal club buildings in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Following Huehl's death in 1918, Schmid organized his own firm, R.G. Schmid & Co., which was responsible for the Islamic-inspired design of the Medinah Country Club (1925), located near the DuPage County suburb of Bloomingdale, Illinois. That firm was succeeded by Schmid & Ryan in 1927.

One indication of the importance of the Medinah Temple commission to Schmid's career is his listing in the *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*, which begins with the line: "Noted designer of Masonic buildings...."

'Mighty Medinah' Since 1912

At its opening in 1912, the new Medinah Temple was hailed by Shrine members as a grand setting for its ceremonies: "A setting of Arabic



The Medinah Country Club, built in 1925 in then-rural DuPage County, was developed by a group of Shriners. It has been the site of numerous benefit golf tournaments and other organization fundraisers. The building was designed by Richard Schmid, one of the architects of the Medinah Temple.



Over the years, the Chicago Shrine has sponsored a wide array of concerts and charity events, including several performances by America's foremost march composer—and Shrine member—John Philip Sousa (top). "Shrine Day," as seen in this 1976 photo of Little Leaguers with members of the Chicago White Sox (above), is an annual event held at Comiskey Park to raise money for the Shrine Childrens' Hospital.

of Chicago, the new auditorium also became an important site in the city's cultural life. It has been a home for hundreds of public events, from speeches and rallies to concerts and college graduation ceremonies and even circuses. It has brought countless Chicagoans together under its broad roof, providing both momentary pleasures and lifelong memories.

Soon after the temple's construction, the special acoustical qualities of its auditorium became apparent. The installation of a new pipe organ in 1915 was celebrated by a series of concerts with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which marked the beginning of an important association between the two groups.

Many of the Shrine events were restricted to members, but others were open to family members and friends, including a regular series of twice-monthly Sunday afternoon concerts. Many Medinah events elaborated on the Shrine's associations with Islamic imagery. Starting in 1922, an annual series, "Medinah Frolics," featured music, ceremonial drills, and dancing for Shrine members and their wives. In 1926, a program entitled "Pageants of the Orient" was instituted to give Shrine families the "drama and color" of some of the organization's secret initiation rites. Other Islamic-theme events included "A Night in Bagdad: A Fantasy of Oriental Splendor" and "A Night in Constantinople."

The broad range of performers who have appeared at public events at Medinah Temple is impressive. Notables have included: band leader and Shrine member John Philip Sousa (1915), operatic tenor Enrico Caruso (c.1920), ballerina Anna Pavlova and the Ballet Russe (1921), Blackstone the Magician (1933), the “WLS Barn Dance” radio show (1936), Broadway star Mary Martin (1958-59), and most recently, Garrison Keillor’s “A Prairie Home Companion” radio show (1996).

In the early 1920s, the national Shrine organization began to devote time, energy, and money to the construction and operation of local hospitals for crippled children. In 1926, the Chicago Unit of the Shriners Hospitals for Crippled Children opened at Belden and Oak Park avenues on the city’s Far Northwest Side. (It was replaced with a new facility in 1981.)

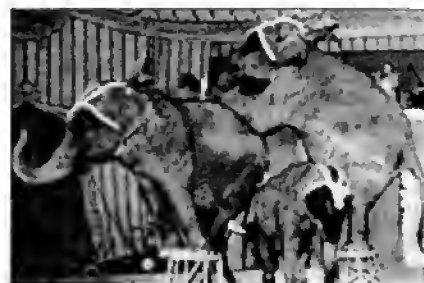
The tremendous growth of the Shrine organization during the 1920s also prompted the creation of two other clubs in the Chicago area. In 1925, the Medinah Country Club was built in then-rural DuPage County, near Bloomingdale. The Islamic design of the club building was by Richard G. Schmid, one of the architects of the Medinah Temple. Four years later, a group of Shriners developed the 42-story Medinah Athletic Club Building, 505 North Michigan Avenue, to provide hotel and recreational facilities for local and visiting Shriners. The Great Depression led to its bankruptcy in 1934; it now houses the Hotel Inter-Continental.

The Depression years also saw a decline in the Medinah Temple’s membership, from 23,000 in 1926 to approximately 14,400 by the mid-1930s.

One of the Medinah Temple’s favorite and most well-known events dates to the World War II era. Although circuses had performed in the building previously (dating to a 1926 matinee performance for Shrine members’ children), the famed Medinah Shrine Circus did not become an annual winter event until 1943. Over the five decades since then, the circuses have raised millions of dollars for Shrine hospitals and other charities, while entertaining hundreds of thousands of Chicago children and their families.

The building’s association with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) was formalized in 1956-57 when the orchestra’s entire season was performed there—due to renovations at Orchestra Hall—under noted conductor Fritz Reiner.

On April 26, 1967, again due to construction at Orchestra Hall, the symphony decided to record Bela Bartok’s “Miraculous Mandarin Suite” at Medinah Temple (RCA Records; Jean Martinon, conductor). Over



Medinah Temple is widely known as the location for circuses and symphonies. The Shrine Circus (top), one of the city’s most popular events, has been held annually at the Temple since 1943. The auditorium’s rich acoustics also made it the recording studio for more than 100 records by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. This 1972 album cover shows CSO music director Daniel Barenboim conducting in the auditorium.

The red fez is a trademark of Shrine membership. This photo appeared in a 1938 *LIFE* magazine article on the Shriners.



the next 15 years, the CSO recorded more than 100 performances at Medinah Temple, on such prestigious labels as Angel, Columbia, Deutsches Gramophon, London, and RCA. Much of the orchestra's world reknown during the tenure of music director Sir Georg Solti came through recordings made at Medinah Temple in the 1970s and early 1980s, including works by Mahler, Berlioz, and Brahms. Other important conductors who recorded with the orchestra in Medinah include current music director Daniel Barenboim, and guest conductors Carlo Maria Giulini, Seiji Ozawa, Erich Leinsdorf, James Levine, Morton Gould, Andre Previn and Karl Boehm.

Along with these cultural events, Medinah Temple also has served as the home for countless benefits, meetings of church, educational, and charitable organizations, high school and college graduations, and business meetings. Shrine membership, however, has continued to decline to a number that could nearly fit within its 4,200-seat auditorium. As a result, the membership approved placing the Medinah Temple up for sale in the summer of 1998.

APPENDICES

Criteria for Designation

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (§ 2-120-620 and 630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to recommend a building for landmark designation if the Commission determines that it meets two or more of the stated “criteria for landmark designation,” as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

Based on the findings in this report, the following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend the Medinah Temple for designation as a Chicago Landmark:

Criterion I: Critical Part of the City’s History

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.

Since its opening in 1912, the Medinah Temple has served as the Chicago headquarters of a popular national fraternal organization, the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (a.k.a. the Shriners). The Shrine was one of several organizations established in the late-19th century that restricted its membership to men already active in “Freemasonry,” a British stonemason’s guild that had evolved into a social club of gentlemen, merchants, and tradesmen.

By the mid-1920s, it was estimated that one-half of the adult males in the United States belonged to some type of freemasonry organization. Membership in the Shrine’s Medinah Temple expanded greatly during the early 1900s, reaching more than 11,000 members by 1911 and 21,000 by 1920—when the Chicago branch was the nation’s second-largest Shrine organization.

In addition to its fraternal functions, the Medinah Temple has also been the site of numerous lectures, school graduations, and musical performances. Among those who have performed in its 4,200-seat auditorium are: band leader-composer John Philip Sousa, opera singers Enrico Caruso and Ernestine Schumann-Heink, ballerina Anna Pavlova, Broadway singer Mary Martin, and numerous composers and conductors, including: Daniel Barenboim, Felix Borowski, Morton Gould, Erich Leinsdorf, Seiji Ozawa, Andre Previn, Sir Georg Solti, and Leopold Stokowski.

Because of its fine acoustics, the auditorium has been used as the recording studio for more than 100 recordings by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Many of the records for which the symphony is internationally recognized were made at the Medinah Temple.

Finally, the Medinah Temple is known to several generations of Chicagoans as the site of the Shrine Circus, which has been an annual winter event at the Medinah Temple since 1943. Proceeds from the event have helped support the Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children, which opened on the city's Far Northwest Side in 1926.

Criterion 4: Important Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.

The Medinah Temple is an important and unusual example of Islamic Revival architecture, aptly expressive of its exotic associations with the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. The architectural style of Medinah Temple is based on traditional Spanish Moorish and Middle Eastern architecture, of which there are virtually no other examples in Chicago.

The building is replete with Islamic details, including horseshoe arched windows (found in the Great Mosque of Cordova and the Alhambra in Granada), distinctive pointed "ogival" arches, and ornate "Arabesques" (intricate patterns of geometric forms or stylized plants) that surround doors and windows.

Two large terra cotta domes covered with arabesque patterns (removed circa 1939), and located on the two corner pavilions facing Wabash Avenue, were based on Persian and Ottoman mosque architecture. The main entrance is flanked by decorative "muqarnas"-filled niches, another prominent feature of Islamic mosques and palaces. The building also incorporates Arabic script into the overall decoration.

The brickwork and terra cotta detailing of the Medinah Temple is a showcase of masonry craftsmanship, which is appropriate for an organization based on masonry trade guilds. The bricks are unusual for their size and texture. Each "brick" is actually made up of clusters of regular-sized bricks, giving the wall a monumental character. In addition, the bricks have a "wire-cut" finish that imparts a distinctive hand-hewn quality. This notion of a handcrafted building is enhanced by the use of architectural terra-cotta, done in dark brown and contrasting reds and blues. This material was used for the building's arabesque-patterned lintels and balconettes, as well as the cornice above the entrance pavilion and other decorations.

The Medinah Temple is one of the best examples of Shrine mosque architecture in the United States. By the early 1900s, the chief use of Islamic architectural styles in this country was for the Shrine organization, which built dozens of Islamic-influenced buildings throughout the country between 1904 and the early 1930s.

Medinah Temple was the first Shrine mosque designed by architects Harris H. Huehl (1862-1919) and Richard G. Schmid (1863-1937). Both men were Shriners and Huehl had served a term in 1905-06 as potentate (president) of Medinah Temple. The partnership had a well-established practice in Chicago before designing the Medinah Temple, but this building's exotic design and detailing gave the firm national prominence. The leading architecture periodicals of the time praised the temple and considered it a masterful expression of Shrine esthetic ideals. Huehl and Schmid—together and separately—went on to design a half dozen other major Shrine-related buildings.

Criterion 7: Unique Visual Feature

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

The monumental edifice of the Medinah Temple has been a cornerstone of the Near North neighborhood since the temple's completion in 1912. Its picturesque Islamic-style architecture, together with its seemingly hand-hewn walls, make it an exotic, if not quixotic, addition to North Wabash Avenue. The Medinah Temple represents a genuine architectural "oasis," as refreshing for its monumental scale as for its curious ornament.

Its dark colors, ornate details, and minimal building setbacks combine to create a four-story mass that seemingly rises right from the flat urban landscape. In the truest mark of a visual landmark, no one can miss seeing—and remembering having seen—the Medinah Temple.

Although its architecture was intended to reinforce the Islamic-based pageantry for its members, the building also is remembered by generations of Chicagoans who saw it as the fanciful backdrop for the annual Shrine Circus. Over the decades, the Temple also has been a well-known destination for the hundreds of thousands—if not millions—who have attended not only the circus, but various concerts, high school and college graduations, and a wide variety of other performances.

Integrity

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

The exterior of the Medinah Temple Building retains its historic integrity to a high degree. The principal alteration to the original design has been the removal (circa 1939) of the two original terra cotta domes on the Wabash Avenue corner pavilions. (Simpler, less ornate onion-shaped domes, made of sheet metal, were erected in 1954 and removed in 1995). With only a few other minor exceptions, the remainder of the building's original exterior design is intact.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features

Whenever a building is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its preliminary evaluation of the Medinah Temple, the Commission staff recommends that the significant historical and architectural features be identified as:

- all exterior elevations, including rooflines; and
- the following interior features of the Medinah Temple auditorium: the auditorium ceiling, including the main dome and three secondary domes; on the west wall of the auditorium, the proscenium arch and the matching ornamental surrounds around the flanking organ consoles; the capitals of the two floor-to-ceiling columns; and the interior casework of the windows.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CITY OF CHICAGO

Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development

Alicia Mazur Berg, Commissioner

Brian Goeken, Deputy Commissioner

Report Preparation

Terry Tatum, research and writing

Chicago CartoGraphics, layout

James Peters, editing

Special thanks to William D. Moore, director of the Livingston Masonic Library in New York, Jean Guarino, and Lisa DiChiera for their research assistance.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Terry Tatum: front cover, inside front cover, pp. 5 (all except top left), 6 (all except far right), 8.

100 Years of Love: pp. 2, 3 (left), 9 (top), 11, 14 (top), 15, 17 (top), 18, 19.

Chicago and Its Makers (1929): p. 3 (right).

Architectural Record (April 1913): pp. 5 (left), 6 (far right), 9 (below).

Art History by Marilyn Stokstad (1998): pp. 7, 12.

Commission on Chicago Landmarks: p. 13 (top left).

Tropical Splendor: An Architectural History of Florida: p. 13 (top right).

America: Life and Culture Society (1994): p. 13 (left).

Faith and Form: Synagogue Architecture in Illinois (1976). p. 13 (bottom).

The Architecture of Rubush & Hunter (unpublished dissertation, 1985: p. 14 (left).

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LIFE magazine (May 16, 1938): pp. 17 (top), 20.

"American Shriners' Mosques, 1904-1930": p. 17 (bottom).

Chicago, Yesterday and Today (1932): inside back cover.



The Medinah Temple looms over a tree-lined Wabash Avenue in this photograph taken shortly after its opening in 1912. The pastoral quality of this scene contrasts markedly with the Temple's present-day surroundings (see inside front cover).

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The Commission is staffed by the
Chicago Department of Planning and Development
33 N. LaSalle Street, Room 1600, Chicago, IL 60602

312-744-3200; 744-2958 (TDD)
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